



Indiana's 2011 Education Agenda: Putting Students First

Prominent national figures have called education the civil rights issue of our generation, but as our state and nation continue a decades-long quest to achieve equal educational opportunities for all students, it's clear that education is the civil rights issue of every generation. This may be our best chance to make the kind of systemic changes that will benefit our students, and therefore our state, for generations to come.

This legislative session, we will—first and foremost—have the debate on what is best for Hoosier children. We must be willing to engage in difficult conversations about the long-standing practices that have favored adults over children. And during these trying economic times, we must stop asking how to get more money for education and begin pursuing the most education for our money.

Too often it's not a lack of money or resources that keeps individuals, states and nations from achieving their goals—it's a lack of courage. This is the moment for Indiana to emerge as a national leader for innovative and aggressive education initiatives that put student success first. We cannot afford to keep doing what we've been doing. We must truly hold the best interest of students at heart, and we must not fail to act now.

Indiana students deserve the best school options to meet their individual needs. Indiana students deserve high-quality teachers in all their classrooms, and those teachers deserve to be rewarded for their success. Indiana students deserve dramatic change to a system that sometimes allows geography to put them in failing schools. And Indiana students deserve an education system focused on academic results and not focused on complying with outdated and unnecessary laws and regulations.

The actions taken during this session of the Indiana General Assembly will foreshadow Indiana's future prosperity. Now is a time for change, a time for courage and a time for dramatic action. Anything less would cheat Indiana's schools and children.

The following actions are necessary to create the vibrant, challenging and successful system of schools Indiana's children deserve:

Identify and Reward Great Teachers and Principals: Give Local Leaders Flexibility to Promote Excellence.

- School leaders must have the autonomy to make the improvements necessary to bolster student achievement and should be held responsible for the performance of their schools.
- Promote excellence by identifying and rewarding great teachers and school principals based on their performance rather than seniority or degrees held—two things research shows have little influence on teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

- Reliable, fair, accurate evaluations, which are informed by student achievement or growth data, should be used each year to assess teachers and administrators, recognize our best educators and identify those who need support for improvement.
- Administrators must use these evaluations to inform decisions about hiring, firing, professional development, compensation, placement, transfers and reductions in force.
- Collective bargaining agreements between school corporations and teachers' unions should focus on salary and wage-related benefits and should be innovative in recognizing performance through compensation.
- Tenure should be awarded to teachers based on performance instead of seniority.

Real Accountability and Flexibility: Empower School Leaders. Bring Success to Failing Schools.

- Hold all schools accountable for achieving results for students.
- We must demand swift and dramatic improvement from all chronically failing schools and provide the state all the necessary tools to intervene when local leadership has failed to offer a quality education to children.
- Students in our failing schools need the best teachers and leaders to help them catch up to their peers. We must free school leaders in our lowest-performing schools from restrictive collective bargaining agreements between school corporations and teachers' unions that prevent schools from making staffing decisions in the best interest of students.
- We must give all turnaround managers adequate time to demonstrate improvement, but we must also set rigorous annual performance goals and replace ineffective managers as quickly as possible.
- Once schools successfully improve student performance, we must act with care to be sure the school community has the autonomy and freedom to maintain success. The State Board of Education will appoint the first school board to successful turnaround schools and allow the community to decide how best to operate the school once state control is relinquished.
- Create a "Parent Trigger" – if 51 percent of parents in a school sign a petition, the state can step in early to turn around a failing school.

High Quality Options for Families: Offer Equal Educational Opportunities to All Children. Give Parents a Voice.

- Every student should have the opportunity to attend an excellent school.
- Allow students to graduate early and offer them a college scholarship equal to the amount the state would have spent on the last year of high school.
- Ensure state education dollars follow the needs of students so parents can select the best possible educational options for their children.
- Create an Indiana Charter School Board to authorize new charters across the state.
- Allow private higher education institutions to apply to the State Board of Education to authorize new charters.
- Increase accountability for all charter authorizers. Only let the best open, and close poor performing charters.
- Expand virtual charter schools to reach underserved students and to fill gaps in the traditional system.
- Eliminate caps on charters and help them access safe and appropriate public facilities.
- Grant schools and communities more authority to convert failing schools to charters.